

VZCZCXRO8370
PP RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHNEH
DE RUEHNE #0260/01 0421121
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 111121Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5354
INFO RUCPDO/USDOC WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHHJJPI/PACOM IDHS HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1539
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 4311
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 3530
RUEHNEH/AMCONSUL HYDERABAD 0272
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1932
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RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 9318
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7603
RHOVVKG/COMSEVENTHFLT
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000260

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STATE FOR SCA/INS, PM/CBM, PM/PRO

STATE FOR SCA/PPD, PA/RRU

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USDOC FOR 4530/IEP/ANESA/OSA FOR BILL MURPHY

E.O. 12958:N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: OBAMA PRESIDENCY, PAKISTAN,
ISRAEL-PALESTINE; NEW DELHI.

This countrywide cable reports on relevant media reaction/opinion from India's large non-English press. The Mission reports on English-language media via email through the daily "Early Edition" summary.

OBAMA PRESIDENCY

1. "GREAT EXPECTATIONS FROM OBAMA," op-ed in the February 10 DAINIK JAGRAN Hindi daily by right-wing economist Bharat Jhunjhunwala: "Gandhi's photo hangs in Obama's office. He says India and the U.S. are natural partners. This talk is fine, but kind of superficial. Obama's mission is to salvage the economy. That is both good and bad for India. He has promised improvement of U.S. infrastructure, which could bode well for Indian engineers and material suppliers. On the other hand, he could tighten America's purse-strings, which is not good news for India, just as suppliers are hit when a new management takes over a failed company. The US financial sector has slipped into a major crisis. Obama wants to solve this problem by embracing protectionism. Higher import duties will be imposed on import of goods and services from China and India. Obama can either augment trade ties with India, or strategic ties with Pakistan. It is likely his thrust will be on the latter, because of Pakistan's strategic importance in the war against terror in Afghanistan."

PAKISTAN

12. "DANGEROUS SCIENTIST OUT FREE" op-ed by Lata Raje in the February 11, 2009, Mumbai edition of centrist Marathi daily Lokmat. "In terms of difficult challenges facing President Obama, the economic crisis ranks first followed by Pakistan... the Lahore High Court has freed A.Q. Khan and this has become a cause of worry for the United States. But in the not so distant past it was this same U.S. which sided with A.Q. Khan and ensured his safety. Before becoming the 'Father of the Pakistan Bomb' Mr. Khan used to work out of Holland in a laboratory. The Dutch authorities arrested him when evidence that he was trying to smuggle nuclear technology arose. But before this matter was able to be brought before the courts, the U.S., through the CIA, pressured the Dutch government and ensured Khan's safe release. America's ever partisan attitude towards Pakistan has ensured the constant protection of this treacherous person. If the U.S. were to halt aid to Pakistan, many questions could be resolved but the U.S. aid continues unabated."

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

13. "CHALLENGE OF WEST ASIA" op-ed by A.K. Trikha, the former head of the National Defence Academy, in the February 11, 2009 Mumbai edition of centrist Marathi

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Daily Sakaal. "While facing grave economic problems, international affairs are of equal concern to President Obama. Western Asia and Afghanistan-Pakistan are two important regions for Pakistan. They are also the regions where the war on terror is being fought. So Obama has chosen George Mitchell and Richard Holbrooke as special envoys. As far as the Israel-Palestine conflict goes, only the U.S. is capable of being a mediator. These two constantly warring neighbors can be brought to the negotiating table only by the United States. But for that, the U.S. needs to focus its complete attention on the problem, eliminating favoritism with the goal of seeking a neutral solution. Washington has a very strong Jewish lobby. The majority of the American population is with Israel. This really impacts the country's policy towards Israel. Despite that, President Clinton tried his best to bring some sort of summit between Benjamin Netanyahu and Yasir Arafat. But after President Bush came to power, all those efforts came to a grinding halt."

14. "VICTORY OF HAMAS", editorial in the February 10 right-of-center Urdu daily URDU TIMES, Mumbai: "Israel and Hamas have agreed to a conditional cease fire in Gaza. These conditions indicate that Hamas did not talk humbly or under pressure. On Sunday, the 8th February, Raphael Eitan, Israeli Minister for prisons announced in Tel Aviv that Israel is ready to release one thousand four hundred Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Israeli soldier Gelad Shalt. Moreover, if Hamas stops rocket attacks on Israel, the latter may, in turn, stop military actions in Gaza. It will ease the blockade of Gaza to some extent. Israel's aforesaid statement shows clearly that Hamas has an edge over Israel. It has defeated Israel during the 23-day war between Hamas and Israel."

MULFORD